

Catie Scott

*How to Lose a Popularity Contest*, Stephen Campanelli

<https://tubitv.com/movies/100049581/how-to-lose-a-popularity-contest>

WC: 713

*How to Lose a Popularity Contest* begins by laying its cards on the table face-up. Starring Sara Waisglass as Ellie, an overstated Rachel Berry without the singing or gay dads, and Chase Hudson as popular slacker Nate, who could be loveable, but was nerfed by awkward acting and even more awkward writing, the new Tubi original film is a formulaic teenage love story about the dumb jock and the nerd: as puppetmaster Ellie runs Nate's campaign for class president to get back at her ex-boyfriend, the two will inevitably fall for each other through their unexpected but genuine connection. Completely forgettable on its face, the film should vanish into Tubi oblivion, among the free streaming platform's more than 100 other annual original releases — but its lead actor, Chase Hudson, has drawn the film slightly more attention than it would typically receive.

Hudson is an influencer known best as Lil' Huddy, but he's since dropped the *Lil'*, eager to leave behind his juvenile past: cringe-worthy e-boy TikTok content, which has amassed him more than 30 million followers on the platform alone, the infamous Hype House, and the overall teenage angst his persona exuded. Now a pop-punk musician, Huddy exudes the exact same thing. In his own words to NME, "Teenage angst is something that will never die." The "21st Century Vampire" singer is also an aspiring actor, with the sprawling filmography of Machine Gun Kelley's *Downfalls High*, a musical film inspired by the album *Tickets to My Downfall* in which Hudson acts opposite Sydney Sweeney, and now, *How to Lose a Popularity Contest*.

The Hype House served as a jumping off point for more than one success story, but Hudson's role as Nate is an interesting attempt at joining the ranks. Former members singer-songwriter Alex Warren and popstar Addison Rae were both nominated for Best New Artist at the 2026 Grammys, and Hudson's ex-girlfriend Charli D'Amelio finished her Broadway run in the musical *& Juliet* in September of 2025. Perhaps he's approaching his career shift with a rep-what-you-know attitude, but so far, it's not helping the public think of him much differently.

The main point of *How to Lose a Popularity Contest* is that popularity doesn't necessarily indicate a lack of substance — after all, as his campaign slogan states, "Nate Reed Wants to Get Serious" — but it unfortunately suggests the opposite. In reverting to standard romcom tropes with a tired angle and sloppy execution, the film hints that sometimes, popular things *can* be shallow and uninspired.

The first sign of actual chemistry between the main characters emerges 58 minutes in. Waisglass, whose previous work includes Netflix's *Ginny & Georgia* and some *Degrassi* spinoffs, has decent comedic timing, but overcommits herself to Ellie's rigidity: while she understands the rhythm of the awkward-high-schooler archetype, her depiction constantly reaches into caricature territory. Hudson just acts like himself, yet it's still hard to believe him.

Most opportunities for depth within the story remain unexplored: Ellie's dead mother is rarely mentioned, her ex-boyfriend's brave departure from her cycle of abuse is glossed over, and Nate's best friend,

Streaker, is never redeemed as any more than the butt of the joke, despite the repeated mention of his daddy issues. The camera work and editing are shoddy, including a visible struggle with how to shoot a scene involving a mirror and a singular haphazard dolly zoom (despite director Stephen Campanelli's assertion that he was once Clint Eastwood's right-hand man). Nate's drawings and half the school's posters look AI generated. References to Shakespeare, Social Darwinism, Minecraft and NFTs are simply confusing. The key to coming out of this film satisfied is to not watch it too closely.

But that's not to say the movie has nothing to offer. In terms of mindless entertainment, *How to Lose a Popularity Contest* is near perfect. Hudson sauntering around while silver chains dangle onto his hairless chest is certain to make preteen audiences swoon. The film is unimaginative, with writing that's sure to frustrate the practically-minded viewer, but ultimately safe and predictable. It has nothing new to say, but perhaps that's the role it aims to fill. Maybe *How to Lose a Popularity Contest* isn't trying to gesture toward complexity or nuance at all — rather than losing any contests, it doesn't attempt to compete in the first place.